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Interagency: Command and Control across the Agencies

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Date: 10 May 2007

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## **Abstract**

As long as the Department of Defense and other agencies continue to talk about interagency solutions as a problem of coordination than it will be a long time before we see a unified effort among the United States government to solve a complex national strategic objective. The crossing, intersecting, and converging lines of operation that the various agencies of the U.S. government apply to a problem will ultimately lead our efforts to failure unless we can begin to dramatically transform our organizations. Combating Al Qaeda and its associated movements (AQAM) requires the United States provide operational leaders with the flexibility to apply all instruments of national power to resolve crisis or combat terrorism. Fighting this adaptive and elusive enemy and idea will require that Ambassadors and Operational Commanders be give the power to make dramatic decisions in their own unique areas of operation. In order to apply parallel, converging, and mutually supporting lines of operation and instruments of national power it is essential to give these operational leaders total authority.

The intent of this paper will be to recommend some institutional and operational level ideas that may contribute to the beginning of a more unified effort at the operational level in applying the instruments of national power. The fundamental argument underlying a majority of the ideas is to create transformation in command and control at the operational level in Phase Zero and Post Conflict operations. These phases should account for most of the time we exist in for combating terrorism with a small percentage of true kinetic conflict in state versus state scenarios. These ideas are the beginning of an interagency effort that can be leveraged over a long period of time. As a war of ideologies, freedom versus terror, it is critical that we begin to transform now. After looking at operational art as applied to the interagency environment, one must look at some of the issues associated with the interagency system of control since 9/11.

*The past decade of experience in complex contingency operations, from Somalia to Iraq, has demonstrated that success requires unity of effort not only from the military*

*but also from across the U.S. government and an international coalition.*

*--Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era. CSIS, March 2004*

## **Introduction**

As long as the Department of Defense and other agencies continue to talk about interagency solutions as a problem of coordination then it will be a long time before we see a unified effort among the United States government to solve a complex national strategic objective. The crossing, intersecting, and converging lines of operation that the various agencies of the U.S. government apply to a problem will ultimately lead our efforts to failure unless we can begin to dramatically transform our organizations. Combating Al Qaeda and its associated movements (AQAM) requires the United States to provide operational leaders with the flexibility to apply all instruments of national power to resolve crisis or combat terrorism. Fighting this adaptive and elusive enemy and idea will require that Ambassadors and Operational Commanders be given the power to make dramatic decisions in their own unique areas of operation. In order to apply parallel, converging, and mutually supporting lines of operation and instruments of national power it is essential to give these operational leaders total authority.

The roots of the extremist ideology lie in the failed and failing states around the world. Our ability to influence countries and societies before they become a haven for terrorism is crucial to our success. As a democracy, it is critical that we build the organizations and tools to address these issues while maintaining our way of life. Ambassadors and Operational military commanders need to be able to fight AQAM with national power over extremely long periods of time. In order for our democracy to bear the burden of fighting this war, these leaders must be

able to quietly and efficiently leverage all power to slowly manipulate the extremist ideology into a more moderate ideology through information, economics, diplomatic, education, stability and security operations, and quietly kill terrorists; a 90% diplomatic, information, economic campaign with 10% military support.

The intent of this paper will be to recommend some institutional and operational level ideas that may contribute to the beginning of a more unified effort at the operational level in applying the instruments of national power. The fundamental argument underlying a majority of the ideas is to create transformation in command and control at the operational level in Phase Zero and Post Conflict operations. These phases should account for most of the time combating terrorism with a small percentage of true kinetic conflict in state versus state scenarios. These ideas are the beginning of an interagency effort that can be leveraged over a long period of time. As a war of ideologies, freedom versus terror, it is critical that we begin to transform now. This paper also recognizes the need to address changes at the strategic level within the National Security Council but it does not focus on those issues. After looking at operational art as applied to the interagency environment, one must look at some of the issues associated with the interagency system of control since 9/11.

### **Operational Art applied to the Interagency Environment**

*“War is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse...”<sup>1</sup>*

If one is to operate under the assumption that the traditional means for waging war (Department of Defense) are subordinate to the political nature or leaders of nations, and the other instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, economic) can be leveraged in a war like fashion in the interests of national security in their own respective environments, then would not one want to apply them under the traditional principles of war? If this is the case, then

the principles of unity of effort and unity of command ought to apply across all agencies of government at all levels of conflict. The Global War on Terrorism should be waged with operational commanders and ambassadors that are given every element of national power to win this war of ideology.

Using operational art as a model, one can describe the current interagency environment using lines of operation; “an imaginary line along which a force moves from its base of operations toward a given physical objective(s).”<sup>2</sup> Our base as a country is clearly articulated in the 2006 National Security Strategy. It is our nation’s values and freedom. It is “the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”<sup>3</sup> The objective is also articulated in the National Security Strategy as the defeat of terrorism and the promotion of freedom and democracy around the world. The lines of operation are articulated in that document as well. “To defeat this threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal—military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing.”<sup>4</sup> Although not specifically addressed, diplomatic, information, and economic means are mentioned throughout the National Security Strategy document.

The 9/11 Commission Report dedicated an entire chapter on what to do in countering the terrorist threat. It highlights the need to establish symbiotic relationships with our instruments of national power and to ensure they operate on parallel lines of operation. However, it makes certain warnings:

“Long term success demands the use of all elements of national power: diplomacy, intelligence, covert action, law enforcement, economic policy, foreign aid, public diplomacy, and homeland defense. If we favor one tool while neglecting others, we leave ourselves vulnerable and weaken our national effort...Our effort should be accompanied by a preventive strategy that is as much, or more, political as it is military.”<sup>5</sup>

The United States must develop institutions and authorities that can implement the strategy in the long term under the leadership of a single individual, ambassador, or commander.

The challenge that operational commanders and ambassadors have today is that the lines of operation in their areas of responsibility are out of their span of control. As a result you have an unsynchronized, unbalanced, and often counterproductive effort in achieving the ultimate objective. And unfortunately, because we have characterized the fight against extremist ideology as a war, we have instinctively put the Department of Defense as the lead in what is essentially a war of ideologies without the ability to direct all instruments of national power. As a result, our nation is fighting an ideological conflict with largely kinetic forces and a weak supporting effort from the other agencies of government. It is time as a military to understand that what is best for our country may be to take a more supporting role in this war and provide resources to an agency that may be better equipped to lead our country in this fight. Our role, although very important, ought to be synchronized in concert with a larger interagency process. The DOD effort should be quiet, in the background, supporting a larger diplomatic, economic, education, and information campaign to win the hearts and minds of the larger moderate Muslim community. We must be willing to subordinate military forces to other agencies in a larger effort. The DOD should become a force provider of sorts to other agencies in efforts to defeat terrorism. And when necessary, the other agencies of government may need to do the same when the conflict arises to the level that the DOD is designated as the main effort. This may mean placing military forces under the command and control of a civilian or ambassador. Likewise, other agencies need to be prepared to give the authority for funds and directing civilian efforts in a non-secure or kinetic environment.

## **History of Interagency C2 since 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq**

*“Chain of command--of all the problems in Iraq, this was the biggest problem.”<sup>6</sup>  
--Former Senior CPA official in Iraq*

During the Clinton administration it became clear that interagency unity of effort was the key to achieving national security objectives.<sup>7</sup> The President issued Presidential Decision Directive – 56. This PDD recognized that:

“Any strategy must integrate the political, military, economic, humanitarian, and other dimensions of our efforts.... It directed an interagency Executive Committee... comprised of senior representatives from every agency that would have a role in a given operation, the EXCOM was charged with developing an integrated pol-mil plan for presentation to the DC [Deputies Committee] and PC [Principal’s Committee], rehearsing the plan prior to execution (and any major transition), and monitoring execution with an eye toward ensuring USG unity of effort.”<sup>8</sup>

“The establishment of the Executive Committee resulted in improved interagency coordination at the strategic level and increased accountability to the President. However it failed to address the authority and resources at the operational and tactical levels.”<sup>9</sup> Once the Bush administration took office it recognized the importance of interagency coordination but never approved an expansion on the PDD-56 to address the shortcomings at the operational level.<sup>10</sup> In 2005, the Bush administration actually superseded PDD-56 with NSPD-44, which places a much greater responsibility for synchronizing interagency processes on the DOS.

After the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the government did not have a strong interagency system in place to coordinate and command planning, administration, and execution of an effort against Afghanistan, or later in Iraq. The 9/11 Commission Report hints at some of the factors that contributed to our country’s vulnerability prior to the attacks. The idea that many of our government agencies and institutions were built in a Cold War environment with a lot of stove piped functions did not allow for command and control across agency boundaries. With regard



to the intelligence community, the 9/11 Commission Report made sweeping recommendations that would increase a significantly larger interagency structure and give more authorities to a centralized National Intelligence Director.<sup>11</sup> They also recommended “a new institution; a civilian-led unified joint command for counterterrorism. It should combine strategic intelligence and joint operational planning.”<sup>12</sup> There was the clear recognition that the lack of a single authority over intelligence gathering and operational planning was a major contributing factor in the 9/11 attacks and follow-on operations. Unfortunately, the same unsynchronized relationships would be in place for the retaliation attacks in Afghanistan only months later.

The Department of Defense was tasked by the President as the lead agency for operations in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Because of the nature of the conflict, and the kinetic phase of operations looming, there was little or no cooperation with other agencies prior to the bombing.<sup>14</sup> The one notable exception during Operation Enduring Freedom was the Central Intelligence Agency’s work with the Department of Defense.

“CIA paramilitary teams familiar with the local terrain and culture teamed with U.S. Army Special Forces and linked up with anti-Taliban Afghan commanders on the ground. The synergy created by CIA paramilitary specialists and U.S. Special Forces exceeded expectations. Intelligence collected by the CIA teams, coupled with the lethal combat arms capabilities of the Special Forces, wreaked havoc with Al Qaeda and Taliban ground forces, first demoralizing, then routing them.”<sup>15</sup>

However, even the command relationship did not place the CIA subordinate to or in support of the Department of Defense at the operational level. It wasn’t until the end of the major bombing campaign and end of Taliban rule that the CJTF finally stood up a Coalition Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) to facilitate a linkage with the other agencies of government like the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>16</sup> Even in 2005 and 2006, during my own deployment to Afghanistan

with CJTF-76, there was much greater cooperation with the Department of State, AID, and other agencies. However, the vast majority of successful applications of interagency resources were due to the strong and cooperative personalities of those involved. The Regional Commanders did not own the resources or have the authority to direct financial, information, or diplomatic resources of other agencies. As a result, the challenge of synchronizing elements of national power at the operational and tactical level was done through the cooperation of determined military commanders and dedicated civilians on the battlefield. However, without that level of personal commitment, the lack of command relationships easily complicates matters and results in counter-productive actions by various agencies. It is during the post-conflict phases of Iraq that we see this happen and the results are catastrophic.

History has clearly demonstrated that the post-conflict planning for Iraq was a gross error on the part of the United States government and military. However, an aspect of the occupation of Iraq that was just as damaging was the conflicting lines of authority, responsibility, and ultimately objectives between V Corps under LTG Sanchez and the Coalition Provisional Authority under L. Paul Bremer. The military's roles and responsibilities were different than those of the CPA's responsibilities. The civilian administration, which did not have a clear chain of command from Ambassador Bremer through the Secretary of State or Defense, caused much confusion.<sup>17</sup> Thomas Rick's book Fiasco described the situation well:

“Fundamentally, the CPA and the military had different conceptions of what the United States was doing in Iraq. The civilians, more in line with Bush administration thinking about transforming Iraq and the region, implemented policies that set out to change the politics, economy, and even the culture of Iraq. The military, less culturally sympathetic to the administration's revolutionary goals, thought of its mission as almost the opposite, calling it ‘stability and security operations’...After the war, the military sought to keep the population quiet, while the CPA ‘focused on change,’ which meant that it was bound to provoke vocal and violent reactions from some Iraqis opposed to those changes.”<sup>18</sup>

Trying to develop parallel lines of operation that converge on a common objective in this environment was practically impossible. The conflicting personalities of the two key leaders only frustrated the situation and created an environment where unity of effort could not overcome the severe lack in unity of command.<sup>19</sup> The result of this unsynchronized application of national power proved counter productive. The de-Ba'athification policy and disbandment of the Iraqi military set by the CPA have had enormous impacts on the security effort. The White House has made reversing the de-Ba'athification policy a major political goal with the Iraqi government, in hopes of stemming the violence in Iraq and bringing about national reconciliation. Had a more unified interagency chain of command been in place, the policy might have received closer scrutiny as applied across a unified effort. The Department of Defense has mitigated some of the risks associated with a lack of C2 relationships by creating a Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) in the headquarters of the combatant commands. This allows for more communication and coordination but does not put the authorities of all agencies under one command.

Today in Iraq and Afghanistan there is a more traditional role for existing United States embassies and ambassadors in the two countries which has allowed Foreign Service officers and military officers to work together. Because of the familiarity of these organizations, unlike the provisional CPA, agencies are at least institutionalized and have some standing business practices that allow for some mutually supporting efforts. However, it does not optimize the principles of unity of command and effort against an adapting and flexible enemy such as the Al Qaeda and associated terrorists.

In response to the failures and complexities of Afghanistan and Iraq, the President signed National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) -44 on 7 December 2005.

However, it still relies heavily on developing coordinating relationships instead of demanding more authoritative and C2 relationships, as well as realignments. “It relies heavily on the State Department rather than the National Security Council to lead the coordination of interagency operational planning.”<sup>20</sup> It does not address the command relationships at the operational level to support the achievement of strategic objectives.

### **Recommendations for the Future**

The subject of interagency command and control has been debated for a long time and many recommendations have been made. I have concluded that without the authority at the operational level to direct resources and personnel of all agencies, it is unlikely that commanders or ambassadors will be able to accomplish objectives in a coherent and efficient manner. In a war of ideologies this may be costly. Therefore, the United States must make significant changes in how it commands and controls instruments of national power in pre, during and post conflict operations.

First, the Department of Defense Unified Command Plan and the Department of State regional command administration must be synchronized with each other. The intersection across the continent of Africa is a clear example of how the DOD and DOS create organizational C2 structures that do not run parallel. It is nearly impossible to get a unified effort on the continent when you have three different combatant commanders covering the continent for the DOD and two different DOS leads on the same continent. The National Security Council ought to create an alignment of commands that corresponds across all agencies of government for easier sharing of information, resources, and collaboration. There will be push back on the idea as agencies

attempt to protect their own areas of interest and self-preservation. However, the overwhelming amount of collaboration and efficiencies gained towards national strategic objectives will outweigh the organizational objectives of those agencies. In this fashion, the United States is also able to begin building lines of operation parallel to each other in the application of national power. This also enhances the ability at the operational level to command and control across the agencies. If one combatant commander and one Department of State Under Secretary for Public Affairs for a particular region have common boundaries, then the ability to share resources becomes a degree easier. Still largely personality driven, it sets the organizational framework for looking at the world across the government. This creates at least a set of shared glasses through which all agencies look at the world and sets up opportunities for creating clearer command and control lines. Dr. James J. Carafano stated the problem well in an address given on the interagency problems of the government in June 2006, “The UCP is still primarily organized to provide global command for the last war... Furthermore, combatant commanders tend to compete with the ambassador in each country in the commander’s area of responsibility... Combatant commanders cannot partner with the State Department at the regional level either, because the State Department’s regional desks cover different geographical areas than the UCP’s areas of responsibility.”<sup>21</sup>

If all the agencies use the same set of glasses to look at the world, the government can begin the next major effort towards achieving a unified approach to addressing our national security approach to the world. The strategic planning process and professional education systems of all the agencies of government dealing in national security affairs need to be aligned.

The idea that the National Security Council needs to develop a senior director and staff to focus solely on strategic planning has been suggested.<sup>22</sup> The military is particularly adept at the

planning process whereas the other agencies of government do not engage in the same level of planning as accomplished by the Department of Defense. I would put forth a further recommendation, based on the assumption that all agencies of government took a standardized approach to the world through a national level unified command plan, that the Under Secretary of State for a Region and the Regional Combatant Commander for a region be required to provide the President and Congress a joint strategic plan addressing their vision for achieving United States national security interests in their region of the world. By demanding the two leaders work together and produce a product, it forces the interagency process to build a plan with parallel lines of operation. However, the challenge remains with designating one agency as the single authority for implementing policy. Therefore, it would be necessary to designate one of the two agencies as a lead agency for a particular country or region of the world. In ninety percent of the world, the Department of State will have the lead because of the environment that will exist. Because the Department of State exists as the diplomatic and political lead for the United States government overseas, it is this arm of government that should lead prior to the Department of Defense. There will be situations where the Department of Defense is designated as the lead (i.e. during times of conflict and war). However, the strategic plan and overall execution will not be done without the input and cosigning by the Department of State. These two agencies should bear the responsibility of answering to the Congress and the President on the strategic plan for their region of the world. This forces both to consider all of the instruments of national power in implementing strategic guidance. It ensures that all of the plans are mutually supporting and do not negate the others' efforts. It forces combatant commanders and Under Secretaries of State for a region to work together and inherently develop organizations that communicate between the two. Authorities may not be shared in this relationship initially

however the efforts of the two organizations will run parallel towards the same national strategic objective. Efficiencies can be achieved in leveraging resources to accomplish missions at the operational level quicker when these close working relationships are established. In a long war of ideologies where the elements of soft power (i.e. political, economic, information, education) are more important than kinetic capabilities, it is the efficiencies in command and control alignments that will make the measurable differences.

When the national government views the world through the same set of glasses and is forced to work together in strategic planning processes, then the institutions of education for those agencies will demand transformation and expanded cross service/agency learning. Diplomats and military officers forced to develop joint national security strategies in a combatant commander staff and Under Secretary of State regional staff will need to understand each others' language. It will be imperative that Foreign Service officers and military officers understand the importance of what the other agencies bring to the national agenda. Understanding the implications of one's own actions as well as the actions of other agencies will be imperative to building supporting plans. It will be important for developing plans that do not heavily rely on one instrument of national power to the detriment of another. As officers understand the relationships of lead and supporting agency in the context of a regional security plan, they will better apply their instruments in that effort. The initiative to create a national security university is one step towards this idea.<sup>23</sup> Developing a broad base of knowledge among all civilian employees throughout the government and military will lead to new ideas of methods for crossing barriers of authority. Exposing officers of various agencies to other organizations will inherently build personal relationships that break down the walls formed by organizations to

protect their own piece of the pie. This is an important step to make generational type changes that need to occur with new and emerging threats.

Finally, with a national security education system that exposes officers to all other instruments of national power and government, a strategic/operational planning system that forces combatant commanders and the under secretaries of state for regional affairs to work together, and a national Unified Command Plan for all agencies of government, we can address command and control at the operational level. The government ought to consider the spectrum of conflict and national security and develop measures of effectiveness to designate lead agency responsibility. In the pre and post conflict phases of failed and failing states, there are opportunities to designate the Department of State ambassadors as the lead agency with command and control over military forces and other United States government agencies involved in the effort. Likewise, in a kinetic environment or war the lead agency may be the Department of Defense. If the DOD is lead, then the operational commander should be given the authorities to apply resources and solutions on the ground to address the problem. This gives the operational commander or ambassador all of the elements of national power at their disposal to address the strategic problem. The DOD and DOS, in a supporting role, still retain their responsibilities to train, equip, and man their own respective forces similar to the method that we use in the Service and joint world today. Of course, this would require significant changes in law and authorities by Congress, similar to Goldwater-Nichols changes to the Department of Defense. However, the benefits of having a synchronized, coordinated effort by a single commander or ambassador put the burden squarely on the shoulders of one individual. Never again, would a commander or leader of an operation be able to point the finger of blame at someone else for the errors and contradictory actions that led to failure. Regional commanders



in Afghanistan would have the full authority to determine which community projects being built benefited the community and supported the military efforts of defeating the insurgency.

### **Conclusion**

To win the global war on extremist ideology and AQAM, our country must develop means for ensuring parallel lines of operation are focused on defeating this threat. It can not be won by employing the agency with the most resources and largest budget. There are also a host of other aspects of the interagency environment that must be addressed as well, to include building the planning capacity of other agencies, national security education institutions, building a new mindset amongst our civilian/government workers, and new authorities/responsibilities at the National Security Council.<sup>24</sup> Often in counterinsurgency efforts, countries and institutions must look inwardly at their organization and structure to determine if there are changes that can be made to win this war. Examples throughout history demonstrate that political change or organizational adaptations are principles for winning a war of ideas. Our government has been organized for the last sixty years for the Cold War. Our laws emplaced balances to prevent certain abuses. However, now in an electronic age and rapidly changing environment, operational commanders must be given the full resources of power to influence the fast and changing complexities on the battlefield or failing state. That commander or ambassador must be able to employ instruments of national power along parallel lines of operation at the enemy's center of gravity. Those instruments must be coordinated and directed by a single authority that can then be held responsible by the chain of command or President. The military must be willing to subordinate its forces to agencies like the Department of State in order to achieve our nation's objectives as well. If we, as a nation, lead with military operational commanders every time we see a threat to our national security then we create a perception in the

minds of the rest of the world that we rule through our military. This drives more believers to the extremist ideology. We must present a strategy that gives diplomacy the lead with the military in step and behind when necessary. This will only change the minds of those considering terrorism as an option. In order to achieve this, the chain of command across the interagency spectrum must be refined to allow operational leaders C2 over other agencies and resources.

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